



SUMMARY OF MAY 11, 2007 ROUNDTABLE

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: POLICY, RESEARCH, PROFESSIONAL ISSUES*

The Institute for Global and Community Resilience (IGCR), part of Huxley College of the Environment of Western Washington University, held a roundtable on May 11, 2007 in Bellingham, WA. During the roundtable, participants discussed the emerging concept of community resilience as applied to the field of emergency management. The purpose of the roundtable was to begin to solicit feedback on the current and future projects of the IGCR and examine potential synergy with Puget Sound area practitioners, business leaders, educators and policy specialists.

This full day event was attended by 26 individuals from a range of professional backgrounds. Ten participants represented Western Washington University, including the university president, College Dean and members of the Institute for Global and Community Resilience. Of the remaining participants, 4 were professionals in regional emergency management agencies, 5 represented local and regional businesses, 4 came from the offices of elected officials and 3 represented other academic institutions working within the field of disaster risk reduction and emergency management. Many of these individuals were interviewed prior to attending the roundtable to understand their perspectives on emerging trends in the emergency management fields. *The perspectives of roundtable participants and those interviewed have helped identify opportunities for current and eventual graduates of the new Huxley program.*

The Concept of Community Resilience

Following introductions by Karen Morse, president of Western Washington University, Brad Smith, Dean of the College of Environment, and Jim Darling, Executive Director of the Port of Bellingham, participants engaged in a thoughtful discussion on the concept of resilience. Jason Levy introduced several resiliency concepts from the disciplines of engineering and ecology. He noted that these definitions often rely upon core concepts of robustness – the ability to withstand stress without a degradation of function – and rapidity – the capacity to meet priorities within a timely manner. He asked whether such definitions were sufficient, alone or in combination, for addressing the increasing disaster losses within the state of Washington and broader region.

The participants engaged in a broad discussion of community resilience, discussing whether the term “community resilience” loses its meaning by being defined differently in different disciplines. Dixie Baker, Brandon Hardenbrook and Bill Boyd noted that a definition of resilience needs to include the concept of community change after a disaster.

* This report prepared by Rebekah Green, IGCR research associate

Even though communities that experience disasters often desire a return to their pre-disaster state, change rather than equilibrium is often important for reducing future vulnerability. Margaret Curtis and Jim Mullen commented that communities must believe they have the ability to reduce vulnerability before resilience will be possible. Gayle Shipley pointed to the importance of a “message” in encouraging community change. Many participants felt that public awareness should be a major focus of IGCR.

In focusing on the goal of community resilience, many participants emphasized that there is a continued need to be better engaged in community education at the neighborhood level, including programs such as the Community Emergency Response Teams and Map Your Neighborhood programs. Jasper MacSparrow emphasized that neighborhoods need to be included in high level planning. Sandra Davis added that funds often support a planning process that does not include neighborhood-scale involvement.

Educating Huxley Students in Disaster Reduction and Emergency Planning

Gigi Berardi, along with Extended Education and Summer Programs Director Barbara Audley and Huxley Dean Brad Smith, presented the “Huxley’s story” of how Huxley positioned itself for state supplemental program funding. Dr. Berardi discussed Huxley’s long time-experience in interdisciplinary programs, highlighting the critical role that Environmental Policy and Planning could play in emergency planning and disaster risk reduction. She explained that two new faculty and a program coordinator/research associate were hired with the supplemental program monies. In addition, the state funding supports a part-time office assistant, research assistant, teaching assistant and program director.

While not a specific goal of the roundtable, participants were enthusiastic about providing input on Huxley’s new Disaster Reduction and Emergency Planning (DREP) track. Bob Freitag noted that the program should focus on the community and neighborhood. Mike Campbell suggested that studies should also explore how people react to emergency plans and how that may differ from we want or expect them to do. Gayle Shipley added comments on the importance of applying social marketing in advocating for behavior change. Jim Mullen and Sandra Davis furthered this by suggesting Huxley had a role to play in educating public officials and planners about the importance of partnering with communities and neighborhoods for preparedness. This dynamic conversation illustrated the value and need to continue a dialogue with future employers of DREP graduates.



Participants discussed skills they felt students should gain in this program. These included practical skills in geographic information systems (GIS), concrete

understandings of land use planning and knowledge of infrastructures systems. However, a broader set of skills was also identified during roundtable discussions and pre-event interviews. Those interviewed noted that students with a foundational understanding of mitigation, planning, response and recovery could be quickly trained for the specific skill sets in a range of agencies and companies. Interviewees also pointed out that professionals understood and supported the need for training the next generation of emergency managers. The new program could support this by helping to make emergency planning a recognized profession, grounded in theory-based practice.

Roundtable participants also pointed to the non-technical skills that the program needs to instill in students. Bill Boyd noted that the field needed “emergency collaborators,” people with the skills to build consensus and enable change. Charlie Axton also added that students needed to be able to identify grass roots efforts at emergency management and support those efforts without over-codifying them. Other participants added skills in managing organizations during crises, leadership, communication, a strong set of ethics and being able to impart bad news and then work for change.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

The roundtable was concluded with a S.W.O.T. analysis. Following from the discussion of the DREP education program, participants were eager to identify internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats to the undergraduate program, and to a lesser extent, the complementary Institute for Global and Community Resilience.



Participants identified strengths in the setting of the program within a respected institution where courses can be built upon a broad range of training in environmental studies, science, planning and emergency management. They noted that this setting is strengthened by the faculty, students and existing networks within the international arena and local private and government sectors.

Despite these strengths, participants noted weaknesses in the program’s newness and limitation regarding the number of students and faculty. They also added that a lack of established partnerships within the business, civic and public sector contributed to the new program’s weaknesses. In terms of classes, the participants felt that the current requirements for the DREP students focused too heavily on the environment.

More broadly, participants suggested that shifting political climates, fuzzy and changing definitions within the job market and reduced financial support could undermine the program. Excitement surrounding the concept of resilience could also wane. Like other buzz words, participants worried that resilience could become too generalized a concept to be useful, becoming irrelevant. With short public attention spans and competing

university priorities, the program could become marginalized or even extraneous to changing community needs.

Counterbalancing these threats to the program, participants and interviewees listed exciting opportunities for research and cross-sectoral collaboration. Locating the program at Western Washington University can facilitate student and faculty collaboration with multiple US and British Columbia universities. Participants also added that the Pacific Northwest offers significant and varied hazards including the Cascadia subduction zone, border security and the potential need for shelter-in-place for a large number of people within the Puget Sound basin. Most importantly, participants noted that the program's focus on resilience and prevention has the potential to focus research and work on positive community change. They suggested that the academic institution can analyze studies of past events, translate international experiences to support better planning locally and help to raise issues in a non-politicized, and regionally neutral manner. In doing so, the program can help keep critical and emerging issues alive through inquiry and a search for coherence between theory and practice.

Next Steps

The May 11, 2007 roundtable helped begin an ongoing discussion with local and regional practitioners, business leaders, educators and policy specialists regarding IGCR and potential trajectories. The roundtable highlighted the importance of ongoing dialogue between IGCR and these communities. The participants' eagerness to discuss IGCR, but also the complementary undergraduate education track in Disaster Reduction and Emergency Planning, has shown the value strong links between DREP and future employers can have for undergraduate education. It also highlighted the significant opportunities DREP students have while also being exposed to complex issues of professional practice within the emergency management and business arenas.

The May 11, 2007 roundtable suggests directions for further exploration:

- How can the concept of community resilience accommodate rapid social and environmental change? How can current growth and development be better used as an opportunity for risk reduction?
- How can we better understand and model current social behavior and behavior change in regards to disaster preparedness and risk reduction?
- What tools and strategies can we develop to better involve the public in reducing disaster risk?
- How can characteristics of particular communities (e.g. geographic location, tribal status, health and food security, income and ethnic makeup) be more effectively harnessed as a means of developing community resilience?
- How can we better facilitate household and business recovery after a disaster?
- How can we harness the resources from the private sector and enhance business continuity planning?

Looking forward, IGCR plans to expand the dialogue initiated in this first roundtable. It is critical to begin similar conversations with local and regional non-profit and grassroots organizations. Their perspectives can strengthen our understanding of how local populations and subpopulations may be vulnerable to hazards and ways in which practitioners can better support community resilience. Likewise further conversation with international practitioners, grassroots organizations and educators can help bring global expertise in emergency planning and the growing field of disaster risk reduction to the DREP program and the region.

Critical to this expanded dialogue will be further exploration of research agendas for IGCR. These research agendas can push our collective understanding of emergency planning and community resilience and strengthen both teaching and practice in the region.

Roundtable Participants

Barbara Audley, Western Washington University, Extended Education
Charlie Axton, FEMA Region 10
Dixie Baker, Science Applications International Corp.
JoAnn Baria, Pierce College
Gigi Berardi, Institute for Global and Community Resilience
Bill Boyd, Bellingham Fire Department
Mike Campbell, Pierce College Center of Excellence, Homeland Security
Richard Civile, Institute for Global and Community Resilience
Margaret Curtis, Wilson Engineering
Jim Darling, Port of Bellingham
David Davidson, Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University
Sandra Davis, CH2MHill
Ardis Dumett, Office of Senator Patty Murray
Bob Freitag, Univ. of Washington, Inst. for Hazards Mitigation Planning and Research
Brandon Hardenbrook, Pacific Northwest Economic Region
Sally Hintz, Office of Sen. Maria Cantwell
Laura Jensen, Institute for Global and Community Resilience
Sonny Kunchick, Institute for Global and Community Resilience
Jason Levy, Institute for Global and Community Resilience
Jasper MacSlarrow, Office of Congressman Rick Larson
Scott Miles, Institute for Global and Community Resilience
Karen Morse, President, Western Washington University
Jim Mullen, State of Washington Department of Emergency Management
Greg Rust, Cherry Point Refinery
Gayle Shipley, Environmental Health and Safety, Western Washington University
Brad Smith, Dean, Huxley College of the Environment, Western Washington University

Participants Interviewed But Unable to Attend

Steve Bailey, Director Pierce County Dept. of Emergency Management
Rick Dale, iXP Corporation